DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 274 004 CS 505 363

AUTHOR Thompsen, Philip A.
TITLE Bridging the Gap between the Broadcast Tower and the Ivory Tower: Integrating Telecommunications into Speech Communication Curricula.
PUB DATE 20 Sep 85
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri (Springfield, MO, September 19-21, 1985).
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Trends; Higher Education; Interdisciplinary Approach; Mass Media Effects; Persuasive Discourse; Research Papers (Students); *Speech Communication; *Speech Curriculum; *Teaching Methods; *Telecommunications; Writing Exercises; *Writing Improvement
IDENTIFIERS Media Use

ABSTRACT

The erosion of students' ability to use the printed word caused by electronic media has led some communication scholars to predict that a new literacy of communication may be needed for the future. Activities enhancing awareness and analysis of telecommunications and performance in telecommunications can easily be integrated into the speech communication class. Some suggested assignments are as follows: (1) the monitoring assignment, in which students keep a diary of their telecommunications usage; (2) the survey assignment, in which students construct a simple questionnaire on media usage; (3) the informative speech, for which a topic in the communications field is assigned; (4) the term paper, for which the research topic assigned is one related to analysis of telecommunications; (5) the original research project, in which students research an area of communications in which they are particularly interested; (6) the persuasive speech, in which the student argues a premise based on analysis of telecommunications; (7) video recording of speeches, from which students can observe their nonverbal communication skills; (8) the interview assignment, in which students interview their peers who role-play a current news maker; and (9) the manuscript speech, in which students read a prepared newscast or radio drama. (HTH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED274004

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Bridging the Gap Between the Broadcast Tower and the Ivory Tower: Integrating Telecommunications Into Speech Communication Curricula

by

Philip A. Thompsen

William Jewell College

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Philip A. Thompsen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Presented to the Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri 1985 Convention, September 20, 1985

CS 505 363

Every day, the average American adult spends 3 hours and 16 minutes watching television, and 3 hours and 12 minutes listening to radio.[1] Nearly half of the average adult's waking hours is spent receiving mediated communication from these two media alone, and TV and radio are being joined by a host of emerging technologies that threaten to consume an even greater percentage of the typical American day. It disappoints, but does not surprise me when nearly a third of my freshmen students admit they have not read one book in the past six months. By the time a young person finishes high school, over 16,000 hours have been devoted to television viewing, including about 800,000 commercials.[2] Who has time to read? As Neil Postman points out: "the imperial dominance of typography has come to an end in America. . .the printed word has moved to the periphery of our culture and the electronic image has taken its place at the center."[3]

While educators were quick to detect the erosion of their student's ability to use the printed word, the reaction of academia to this situation has been hesitant. For the most part, our educational system is based on print literacy. Yet there are those who predict that a new literacy may be needed in the future, a literacy of communication. Leonard Goldenson,

chairman of the board of the ABC television network, put it this way:

> [We] can no longer rely on our mastery of traditional skills. As communicators, as performers, as creators--and as citizens--[the electronic revolution] requires a new kind of literacy. It will be a visual literacy, an electronic literacy, and it will be as much of an advance over the literacy of the written word we know today as that was over the purely oral tradition of man's early history.[4]

Marshall McLuhan foresaw the dawning of a new literacy two decades ago,[5] but he saw a return to the oral literacy that preceded print literacy. While print literacy is hardly dead, the educational system is struggling with its traditional means of instruction; the broadcast tower and the ivory tower seem to be drifting further apart.

As communication scholars and instructors, I feel we have a special responsibility to bridge the growing gap between the way most of us learned to think and the way our students are being taught to think by the electronic media. I am not implying a reduction of academic standards at all, but rather an expansion of our curriculum to include awareness and analysis of telecommunications. I am in good company when I make such a proposal, for the Association of American Colleges, in their recommendations from the Project on Redifining the Meaning and Purpose of Baccalaureate Degrees, said:

> Television is so much a part of our lives that it is foolish simply to deplore its weaknesses and its bad habits. Students need to learn how to look at and listen to their television sets critically, with as much focused intellectual energy as they are expected to apply to other experiences that call on their ability to listen and see intelligently.[6]

Unfortunately, most of us work at institutions that do not presently require a course in telecommunications analysis, and may not for quite some time. But the basic speech course has become a standard requirement for many secondary schools and most institutions of higher learning. Is there room in this course for some elementary telecommunications instruction?

It is my hope that there is room, and it is the intent of this paper to provide a few hints as to where this room might be found. If students are to develop the ability to see the truth behind the video curtain, to critically and creatively think in the communications environment of the future, to lead society through these changing times, they must be equipped with a substantive understanding of the electronic media, and I feel the most logical place to begin that learning process is in the basic speech communication course.

What follows is simply a few ideas I am offering for your consideration as learning experiences for your basic speech communication students. Feel free to use them, modify them, combine them, or go beyond them. Perhaps they will inspire you to develop your own unique way of addressing this important topic in your classes. I hope they may be of some utility in your quest to teach your students not only how to use the media, but also how the media uses them. I have grouped my suggestions into three categories: awareness of telecommunications, analysis of telecommunications, and performance in telecommunications.

Awareness of Telecommunications

While most people realize that telecommunications is an important part of daily life, few are aware of the extent it consumes the time and energy of an average person. I think the fist step in integrating telecommunications instruction in the basic speech course is increasing the awareness level of students in the area of telecommunications use. Here are a few specific suggestions as to how this might be accomplished:

1. The monitoring assignment. Ask students to keep a diary of their telecommunications usage. You may elect to have your students keep their diary for a day, 48 hours, five days, or perhaps a week. In the diary, have students write down the media used (broadcast TV, cable TV, radio, pre-recorded video), the station watched or listened to, and the length of time they spent watching or listening. Other items you may wish to include is the location of use (at home, in a car, or elsewhere outside of the home), whether the media was used in the company of other persons or by oneself, whether the media was used as a primary activity or was secondary to another activity (such as studying with the radio or TV on), and other details, such as whether the television set used was color or black-and-white, or if the radio was stereo or monaural. At the end of the monitoring period, have each student prepare a report based on the diary to present to class. The report should include total usage of each media, individual stations, and each individual category

of information you asked they keep tabs on in the diary. The reports of each student can then be used as a basis for class discussion, or the individual reports can be combined into one report for the class as a whole. It is interesting to determine viewing and listening averages for a class, and comparing those figures to national norms. This assignment brings home to the student in a practical way the extent the electronic media consumes his or her time.

2. The survey assignment. This is similar to the previous exercise, but instead of asking students to keep a diary of their own media use, have them construct a simple questionnaire on media usage. The same questions used in the monitoring assignment can be used here, with appropriate adjustments (such as asking respondents to detail media use in the past 24 hours). To keep things simple, have each student ask 15 people to participate in the survey, and have the questions worded to elicit forced-choice responses (to facilite the coding of data). If every student asks 15 people to particpate, a class of 20 could produce a pool of 300 respondents, resulting in a wealth of interesting data that could reveal media usage patterns in a very realistic manner. An effective way to give this assignment is to divide the workload among the class members by dividing the class into small groups, each group handling one part of the assignment. In this way, small group communication skills can be developed concurrently, and if sufficient details of the assignment are left to the discretion of each group, problem solving skills can be developed as well.

3. The informative speech. They are many topics a student could choose for an informative speech, so it makes sense to assign topics in the communications field. A few possible telecommunications topics for an informative speech include:

-- religion on TV and radio
-- the new TV season
-- TV news broadcasting
-- noncommercial radio
-- shortwave radio
-- broadcasting in other countries
-- the appeal of soap operas
-- how Americans use broadcasting
-- children's television
-- sports on TV and radio

Assigning a topic such as these has the dual benefit of providing practice in informative speaking and learning about an aspect of telecommunications.

Analysis of Telecommunications

Critical thinking in the communications age should be one goal of every communication course. Here are a few suggestions on how analysis of telecommunications could be used in the basic speech course:

1. The term paper. If you require a major paper for the basic speech course (or similar communication course) an excellent research topic could be one related to analysis of telecommunications. The paper could be a library research paper on a timely topic of interest, or a book report on a major work in the field.

2. The original research project. I have found this assignment particularly useful in my introduction to telecommunications course, but modified it could be used in any communications course. I ask students to identify one question in the area of telecommunications they are interested in doing original research on. Then they chart a program of monitoring, experimenting, surveying, or other method of research. After I approve their selected topic and method of research, they have the remainder of the term to conduct their research and write a report based on their findings. A few of the topics students have researched include:

-- a survey of children and their favorite TV shows
-- a content analysis of sports broadcasting
-- a comparison of radio formats
-- sensationalism in news broadcasting
-- MTV: how it affects radio listening
-- use of music in television advertising
-- depiction of women on television

This assignment provides students with a chance to learn elementary research methods while studying telecommunications. The reports I have received have ranged from those I would consider worthy of publication, to those typical of the procrastinating student, but generally I find this project is a fun one for the students to work on, and an interesting one for me to grade.

3. The persuasive speech. Telecommunications is frequently the scapegoat for society's ills, and sometimes rightfully so. Analysis of telecommunications can result in a variety of possible topics for a persuasive speech:

-- violence on TV is making America more violent
-- sex on TV is destroying our moral fiber
-- watching TV is dangerous to your health
-- rock radio is an evil influence on youth
-- MTV: television at its worst
-- advertising should be banned from children's TV
-- public radio needs more support from Uncle Sam
-- American broadcasting promotes hedonistic values

These and other similar topics make interesting persuasive speeches, as well as encouraging some thoughtful analysis of telecommunications.

Performance in Telecommunications

As television and radio become an increasingly important part of everyday life, the chance our students would have the opportunity to "be on the air" increases as well. Communications education should include some basic instruction in television and radio performance. Here are a few examples of how this might be addressed in the basic speech course:

1. Video recording of speeches. If you have access to video recording equipment, try recording one of the speech performances you have assigned. I prefer to record an early speech in the term, so that I can play the tape back and show the students their nonverbal communication skills. I then record one of their last speeches, so that they can see for themselves the improvement they have made during the course of the term. Most modern video equipment is very easy to operate, and I have found most students eager to serve as cameraperson and video tape operator (you might want to rotate these positions among class members).

2. The interview assignment. A very useful skill to develop in the basic speech course is the art of interviewing (and the art of being interviewed). In this assignment, divide the class into dyads, and have each pair tape record a mock news interview. Each person will have the chance to interview as well as be interviewed. It is useful to have the students role-play a current news maker for this assignment, but you may decide to leave the actual interview topic up to the students. Play the best interviews back for the class, and hold a class discussion on why they thought the interviews were effective, how to pick the right questions, how to avoid embarrassing questions gracefully, etc. If you use audio tape for this assignment, you might want to point out proper microphone usage techniques, and if you video tape this assignment, you might want to discuss the fundamentals of looking good on camera.

3. The manuscript speech. Many basic speech courses have one manuscript speech exercise, and a very effective selection for this speech is the radio manuscript. Sometimes I will provide the copy for the students to read, but if time permits, it is useful to have them write their own script, giving them practice in writing copy "for the ear." A newscast with two commercial spot announcements makes an excellent choice for a manuscript speech, as does a short radio drama or comedy, an editorial, or even a speech consisting of deejay patter. This alternative to the traditional manuscript speech is both fun for the students, and useful in the instruction of performance

skills in telecommunications.

This paper has attempted to provide useful tips on ways to integrate telecommunications education into the basic speech course. I have not mentioned the most obvious method, lecture and class discussion, but this should not be overlooked. I spend at least one full class period in my basic speech couse discussing elementary concepts of telecommunications, and would encourage other speech instructors to do so. I hope that you may find my suggestions helpful to you in providing your students the communication skills needed to be productive citizens in the age of telecommunications.

Notes

[1]National Association of Broadcasters, Profile: Broadcasting 1985, (Washington, D.C.: National Association of Broadcasters, 1984), pp. 4 and 8.

[2]Neil Postman, "Critical Thinking in the Electronic Era," Phi Kappa Phi Journal, Winter, 1985, pp. 4-5.

[3]Postman, p. 4

[4]Postman, p. 4

[5]Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964).

[6]Association of American Colleges, Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community, (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1985), p. 17.